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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000121

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF AND AF/E; LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2015

TAGS: PREL PGOV DJ SO

SUBJECT: CLOSER TIES BETWEEN DJIBOUTI AND SOMALILAND?

Classified By: Pol/Econ Erinn C. Reed for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The self-proclaimed independent state of Somaliland enjoys a close relationship with the Republic of Djibouti due to strong familial ties of their populations and frequent business traffic between the two capitals. While there have been ups and downs, including Djibouti's adherence to the African Union position on the integrity of Somalia, relations have always been calm on the surface. In the past year, the relationship between Djibouti and Somaliland seems to have grown closer. Actions such as the establishment of a Somaliland representation office in Djibouti, and fairly frequent visits from Somaliland ministers, are some indicators of this new level in the relationship. More concrete evidence can be seen in the results of a recent Somaliland ministerial visit to Djibouti 8-13 January. This was followed by a visit from the President of Somaliland on 27 January, while on his way to South Africa. The ministerial meeting, heavily covered by the Somaliland press --but not by Djiboutian media-- ended with the signing of a 14-point agreement to formally establish cooperation on various economic and security related issues. End Summary.

¶2. (U) From information Post has been able to glean from Djiboutian contacts, ministerial meetings in Djibouti between the Somaliland Ministers of Interior, Finance, Communication, Federated Regions, and Air Transport and their Djiboutian counterparts January 8-13 yielded a formal agreement for economic and security cooperation. The agreement, which addressed subjects such as smuggling, maritime security, fishing rights and increased trade, was signed by the Somaliland Minister of the Interior, and the Djiboutian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The January 8-13 visit also included meetings between the mayors of Hargeisa and Djibouti. Somaliland's President, Dahir Rayaleh Kahin, paid a courtesy visit to President Ismail Omar Guelleh on 27 January, while passing through Djibouti on the way to South Africa. This short visit, according to Embassy sources, also led to a more informal agreement between the two governments intelligence agencies to work together more closely.

¶3. (U) The 14-point agreement, which was highlighted in press reports on the ministerial visit, allows for greater cooperation between the two countries in key economic and security areas. The fourteen points are as follows:

- 1) All previous agreements signed between the two parties are still effective.
- 2) Trade between the two parties is to be fortified.
- 3) Strengthen cooperation in the fight against smuggling.
- 4) Strengthen cooperation in the fight against land and maritime terrorism.
- 5) Establish cooperation on maritime borders to improve prevention of unlawful fishing, sea water pollution, and illegal immigration.
- 6) Establish cooperation in health, especially in the areas of HIV/AIDS and Malaria.
- 7) Establish cooperation in intelligence and security.
- 8) Establish cooperation to rebuild roads between the Djiboutian border town of Loyada and the Somaliland border town of Sayla'. (Note: Djibouti has agreed to pay the expenses of the road project. End Note.)
- 9) Establish a joint technical commission to work under the authority of the Somaliland-Djibouti Ministerial Committee. The Technical Committee will meet every four months, while the Ministerial Committee will meet every six months.
- 10) The joint commission will meet alternating between both capitals, Djibouti and Hargeisa.
- 11) Somaliland citizens will be allowed into Djiboutian territory using Somaliland passports.
- 12) Establish cooperation in the fields of transportation, information, politics, development, and traditional arts.
- 13) The technical commission will follow the execution of the present agreement, reviewing each stage to monitor whether both sides adhere to the text of the agreement.
- 14) The Ministers of Interior will act as the leaders of this cooperation.

¶4. (U) In a statement to members of the Somaliland parliament, seen by Embassy's Pol Assistant FSN in Somaliland press coverage, the Minister of Interior reportedly said that the main issue Djibouti is concerned about is smuggling. Djibouti requested Somaliland's assistance in combating the trafficking of illegal merchandise and drugs across the Somaliland/Djibouti border. Somaliland officials did not

confirm or deny the existence of smuggling in their comments to the press. Another major concern of Djibouti's is maritime security. During the discussions, Djibouti and Somaliland reportedly agreed to a joint patrol from Djibouti City to Berbera. Somaliland also agreed to assist in preventing illegal fishing boats from fishing in both government's territorial waters, as well as preventing dumping of nuclear and other wastes.

15. (C) According to Somaliland press, the Minister of Interior characterized Djibouti as "more relaxed" on its position of non-recognition of Somaliland. He also noted that Somaliland asked Djibouti to back requests for recognition to the international community, and asked for Djibouti's recognition of Somaliland independence. The minister is quoted, in the Somaliland newspaper "Haatuf," as saying "When receiving us, Ismail Omar Guelleh told us the Great Somalia didn't work. If Somaliland is descending into hell, we're with you. If Somaliland is ascending to paradise, we're with you." (Note: This is a very rough, literal translation of the Somali text of the article. A more general interpretation of Guelleh's statement would be that whatever the circumstances, Djibouti will stand by Somaliland. Post cannot yet confirm if this is a true change in Djibouti's position or a move to curry favor with the Somaliland public. End Note.)

16. (C) Embassy has been told that discussions did not include livestock issues or moving the Somaliland village of Loyada 20 km farther from the border, as was printed in the Somaliland press coverage of the ministerial meeting. Some believe that perhaps an agreement regarding livestock export issues was reached, but it has not been publicized due to the negative nature of Somaliland public opinion regarding this issue. Somaliland public opinion is reportedly heavily against Djibouti creating a livestock export facility because it is one of many perceived "betrayals" by Djibouti. Livestock export is the greatest revenue generator for Somaliland. Other points of resentment include Djibouti's efforts to expedite the Somalia peace process and its refusal to acknowledge Somaliland independence. Some accuse Djibouti of trying to "suffocate" Somaliland politically and economically because of these actions.

17. (C) Comment: Djibouti has increased its aid/good will gestures towards Somaliland in the past few months, including donations of generators, funds, and an office and residence for the Somaliland representation. The two governments also appear to be showing political will to re-approach each other with more open minds. According to a Somaliland press story several months ago, President Daher Rayaleh Kahin asked the press corp "not to criticize Djibouti and its president," and said "Djibouti does not have a magic wand to grant us recognition." Post does not believe that this move towards closer relations with Somaliland indicates that Djibouti will, at any time in the near future, adopt a policy of recognition towards their neighbor. There remains no fundamental shift in Djibouti's policy on recognition and it continues to adhere to the African Union position. End Comment.

RAGSDALE